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HOW I TEACH SPANISH PRONUNCIATION

This paper gives a résumé of my methods of teaching pronunciation. I am hoping to be able to alter and improve them, however, through an increased knowledge of phonetics—a subject I have never before had the opportunity to investigate.

To begin with, I have tried to work on an inductive basis. Drill in pronunciation as such I have not been in the habit of beginning until about the third week. By this time the class has a vocabulary of fifteen to twenty words, comprising the objects in the classroom and a few verbs. No books are as yet in the pupils' hands.

Pupils seem to gain faster if they are working self-consciously toward an aim that is apparent to them as well as to the teacher. For this reason I am willing to give up the better part of, say, two recitations to the following discussions.

1. Varieties of good pronunciation: Note English analogies. Definitely state compromises made. (This is especially necessary where a considerable number of pupils hear Spanish more or less well spoken at home, and who consequently resent any dictatorial attitude.)

2. Value of correct aural image even in silent reading.

3. Value of aural image as making another "track" in the brain.

To save time I will write a rather "patchy" account of classroom procedure from this point on.

1. Point to objects in room and write down names when given—*La ventana, el pizarrón*, etc.

2. Have them pronounced in concert. Then pronounce them yourself. "Are there any sounds much like English sounds?" Write list of such on board, striking them out in the words. "What sounds are unlike English sounds for given letters?" Make similar list. Try to analyze difference, bringing in first consideration of position of vocal organs. (By defining "alveoles" casually for two or three days while entertaining the class with unwonted antics of the tongue—by so doing one "sneaks up" on the new words and they are learned without much difficulty when set as formal lesson.)

3. Pronounce three or four unknown words bringing in large proportion of sounds discussed; *e. g.*,—*vengan* for the sounds of

ventana. Take useful words as far as possible. "How do you think these are spelled?" Write on board. Correct. Pronounce in concert. Note any new sounds in these words—an endless chain effect that fortunately does end. Keep lists in notebooks, at least for time being. I am not sure that I approve of notebooks, after the text is introduced.

4. Every day review work of the day before. In a week or two—depending on the class—you will have covered the alphabet sketchily. Much drill is still needed. Every day put on board word-lists emphasizing particularly one or two sounds. Pronounce in concert first—then singly, beginning with the best or the boldest of the pupils. Be very aggressive in this work. A useful manner is one which the harassed producer of a play naturally adopts. "No! Get that now and forever! Say it five times! Do you know that you know it?"

5. Begin memorizing little couplets and proverbs. "En boca cerrada no entran moscas" is popular. Pay particular attention—at least a minute or two a day—to *rr*. Let them trill, as almost everyone can, continuously. Then introduce some "trabalenguas." Voiced and voiceless sounds can receive some attention. Little experiments with the windpipe and the ears lend a certain charm. Along with other incidentals open and closed *e* and *o* may be introduced. They do not seem a great stumbling-block. First—"What is a closed syllable?" This is perfectly easy if the teacher divides the words. "In such instances *e* sounds about as in *let*," etc.

All this time other work goes on. Four to six weeks after school opens they have their books. I have had a review from the introduction of the Espinosa-Allen Grammar. The alphabet can now be formally learned. Assign it one day and ever afterward have them spell a line or two—usually in a "free-for-all." They learn it with no impossible effort. Clean up the subject of *o* and *e*, using catchword. "Open syllables and vice-versa!"

As for the rest of the year—have definite returns to the rules of the introduction about every eight or ten weeks, but practice all the time. In assigning a lesson have them practice reading slowly and correctly at sight. I have usually picked out some one little paragraph to be read perfectly the next day. This has given better results than simply assigning the whole new passage for reading. A variation is to give each pupil his own particular passage. By

this method one can cover the number of pages required by the university—sometimes taking four or five pages in a day—for *pronunciation alone*. However, on a “reading day” I usually spend ten minutes or so on some little point on which we are drilling.

The difficulties of reading lessons are that many pupils do their studying at school, and hence cannot obey my injunction to do it aloud. The conscientious ones will study Spanish at home or at least will consciously move the lips in reading. However, in every class I have ever had there has always been a certain proportion of more or less able bluffers. With the amount of drill which it would be an injustice not to give the hard-working but less-gifted pupils, the bluffer can stand up and say his piece with no more preparation than he can get coming down-stairs.

Another kind of difficulty is, that if one paragraph is assigned to the whole class the thing is a bore by the time it has been read often enough to test the class's preparation. So far all I have been able to devise are the following little variations:

I. Books closed.

1. Several people read same passage. At end vote which is best.
2. All listen closely. Raise hands at mistake. “Corrector” proceeds.
3. One reads. Others write and read their results.

II. Books open.

1. 2 above.
2. I call on person to take up reading, sometimes in middle of a word. He is to begin exactly where my interruption was made. Always universal laughter at one who fails.

When each person has his own paragraph there is a tendency for the pupils to take their ease during all performances but their own. Sometimes I suddenly stop and have an (1) unprepared person go on, with the “owner” of the passage as critic. (2) Dictation may be used. (3) A pupil after reading his paragraph may ask his classmates questions on the subject matter.

But after all, successful drill depends upon the true assent of the class to the discipline. As I stated at first, I try to make the pupil see his problem entire—(so far as *I* can see it entire). In this way drill changes its aspect. It is no longer a whim on the part of a demon teacher but an essential and ever-lasting element in every activity.

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